

4. COMMUNITY NEEDS





COMMUNITY NEEDS

The assessment of community needs for park land, recreation facilities, natural areas and programs is a customized analysis that identifies the amount of land, number and types of facilities and variety of programs that are needed now and in the future. This chapter describes the analysis process and summarizes key findings.

WASHINGTON'S RECREATION CONSERVATION OFFICE GUIDELINES

At the statewide level, Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) recommends that communities provide an adequate level of parks and recreation service for the public, and to address existing and future needs. However, the GMA goals do not provide definition of an adequate level of service, nor do the goals provide specific requirements for identifying needs. Instead, communities have flexibility in determining appropriate service levels and methods for identifying needs.

As the primary provider of state funding for parks, recreation and natural resources, the state's Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides guidance for determining needs. While many communities rely solely on numerical level of service (LOS) standards for identifying a specific ratio of needed park land to population, there is increasing emphasis on promoting quality of and access to parkland, as well as gauging public satisfaction. The RCO has developed a LOS tool that assists agencies in evaluating their level of service at a city-wide level or within a smaller area. This tool is based on three sets of criteria: quantity, quality and distribution and access. The RCO tools are designed to allow agencies to use them as provided or to modify them to suit local needs. Table 4.1 includes the suggested criteria and potential indicators that are recommended for periodic evaluation of the City's level of service.



Table 4.1: Recreation and Conservation Office LOS Tool

RCO Proposed Indicator	
Quantity Criteria	
Number of Parks and Recreation Facilities	% difference between existing and desired quantity or per capita average
Facilities that Support Active Recreation Opportunities	% of facilities that support or encourage active (muscle-powered) recreation
Facility Capacity	Percent of demand met by existing facilities
Quality Criteria	
Agency-Based Assessment	% of facilities fully functional per agency guidelines
Public Satisfaction	% of population satisfied
Distribution and Access Criteria	
Population within Service Areas	% of population within 0.5 mi of a neighborhood park/trail; 5 mi of a community park/trail; and 25 mi of a regional park/trail
Access	% of facilities that can be accessed safely by foot, bike or public transportation

Source: Statewide Level of Service Recommendation, Washington Recreation and Conservation Office (November, 2010)



For each indicator, the tool suggests rankings from A (highest level) to E based on a range of results. For example, if the percent of the population satisfied is over 65%, the RCO tool recommends an “A” level of service. The level of service may vary from area to area but a city-wide average LOS ranking can be used as a standard to evaluate conditions within a smaller area. Building from the RCO recommendations, this Plan establishes need based on the three sets of criteria considering quantity, quality and with emphasis on distribution. To identify needs across Renton’s multifaceted park system, the community needs analysis evaluated existing park land, recreation facilities and programs, natural areas and partnerships.



PARK NEEDS

Renton residents desire a quality park system that provides a variety of recreation experiences across the city. However, existing park land is not equally distributed and all residents do not have equal access to developed parks, recreation facilities, programs and natural areas. To help determine park land needs, a GIS analysis evaluated access to existing park sites, based on the routes people must travel to reach these parks. The analysis was based on the assumption that most residents should have access to developed parks and natural areas within one-quarter to one-half-mile (walking/biking distance) from their home or place of employment. By examining the gaps in service, the City can see where additional park land, facilities, programs and natural area land is needed. Land needs were identified city-wide and within each community planning area. The quantity of land is derived from the number of parks needed to fill the geographic gaps in service and the recommended size of parks, by category (as established by the City's design guidelines).

According to the survey, 88% of residents are satisfied with the distribution of recreation opportunities.

Of those dissatisfied, 32% feel that parks and recreation facilities are too far away.

- Community-wide Survey



Having a park within walking distance from one's home was the strongest predictor that a middle-age or older person would use a park.

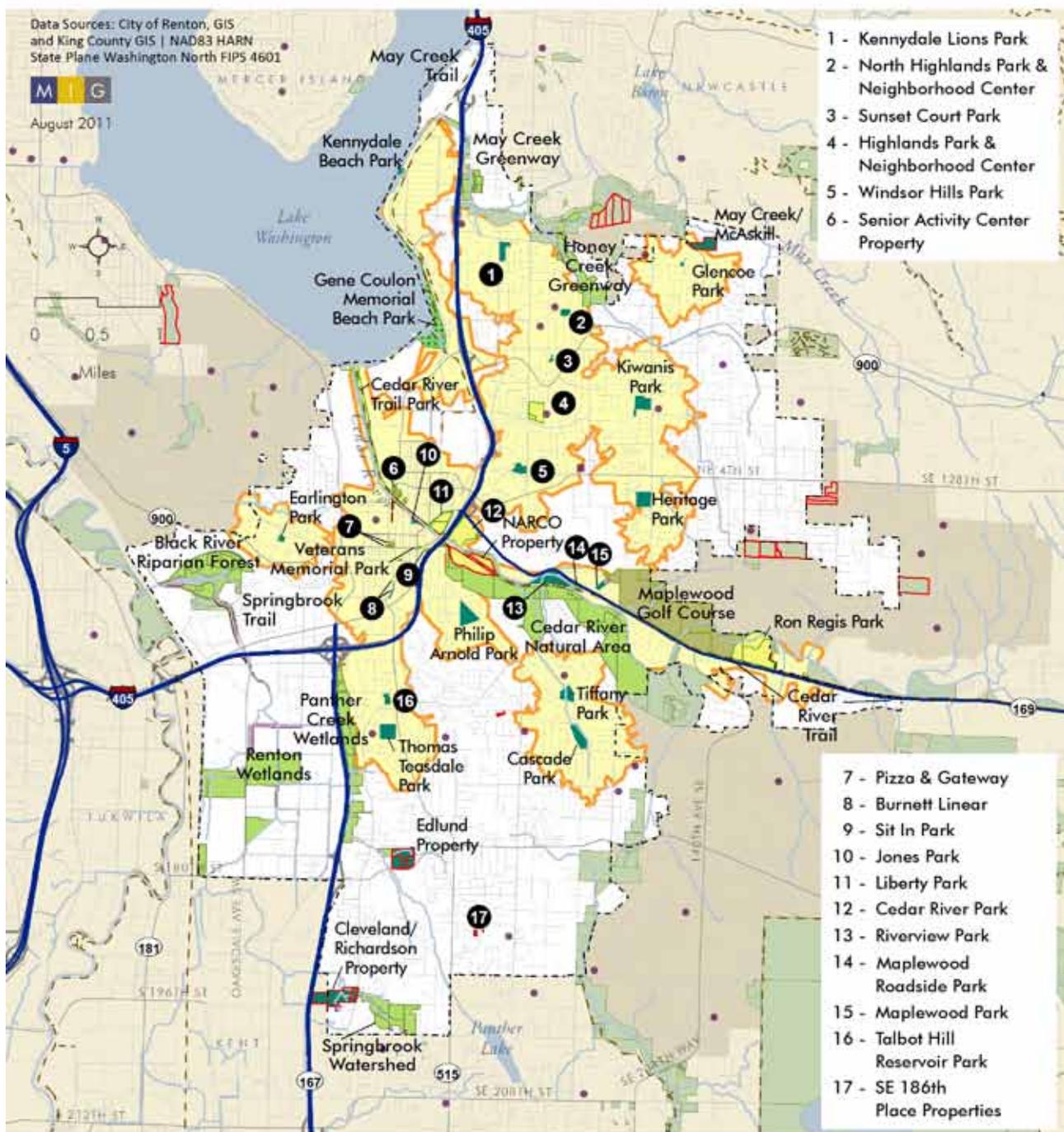
- Godby and Mowen, *The Benefits of Physical Activity Provided by Park and Recreation Services: The Scientific Evidence* (2010)

ACCESS TO DEVELOPED PARKS

Most cities strive for a park system that provides access to basic recreation amenities within at least one half-mile of home or work. In Renton, as in most communities, the half-mile walking distance is the greatest distance most pedestrians are willing to walk to reach a destination. Some residents in Renton are served by one or more parks within a half- mile, while others must travel further from home.

As illustrated by the map, some community planning areas contain multiple parks in close proximity and other areas are underserved, even when counting parks provided by other jurisdictions where future development is pending. Gaps in service can be seen in some residential areas in the Kenndale, East Plateau, Benson, Fairwood, Talbot and West Hill Community Planning Areas.

DEVELOPED PARK ACCESS

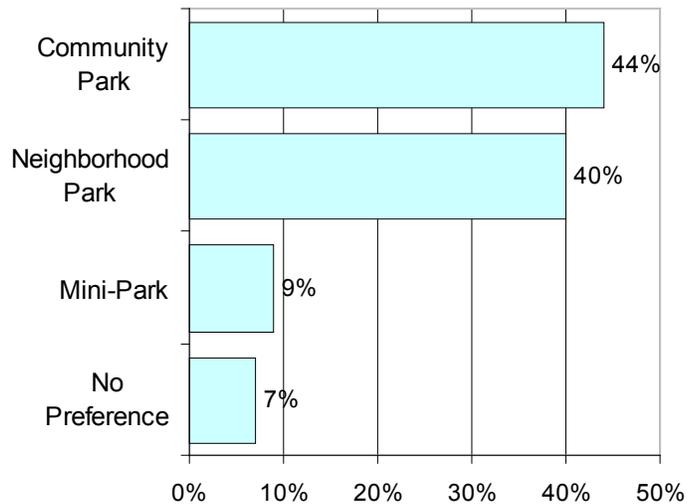




ACCESS TO DEVELOPED PARKS BY PLANNED DENSITY

Higher density development creates a greater demand for parks and public facilities. Parks in these areas must have a capacity to serve a large number of people. For this reason, the assessment crosschecked park access with zoning designations to indicate areas where existing or planned high density residential⁵ and commercial⁶ uses could draw a high concentration of people. As illustrated by the Developed Park Access & Residential Density Map, most high density residential zones coincide with underserved areas—community areas that do not have local parks within a half-mile of potential park users. To maintain a quality park experience high density areas will need additional parks, distributing them at a closer one quarter-mile service area.

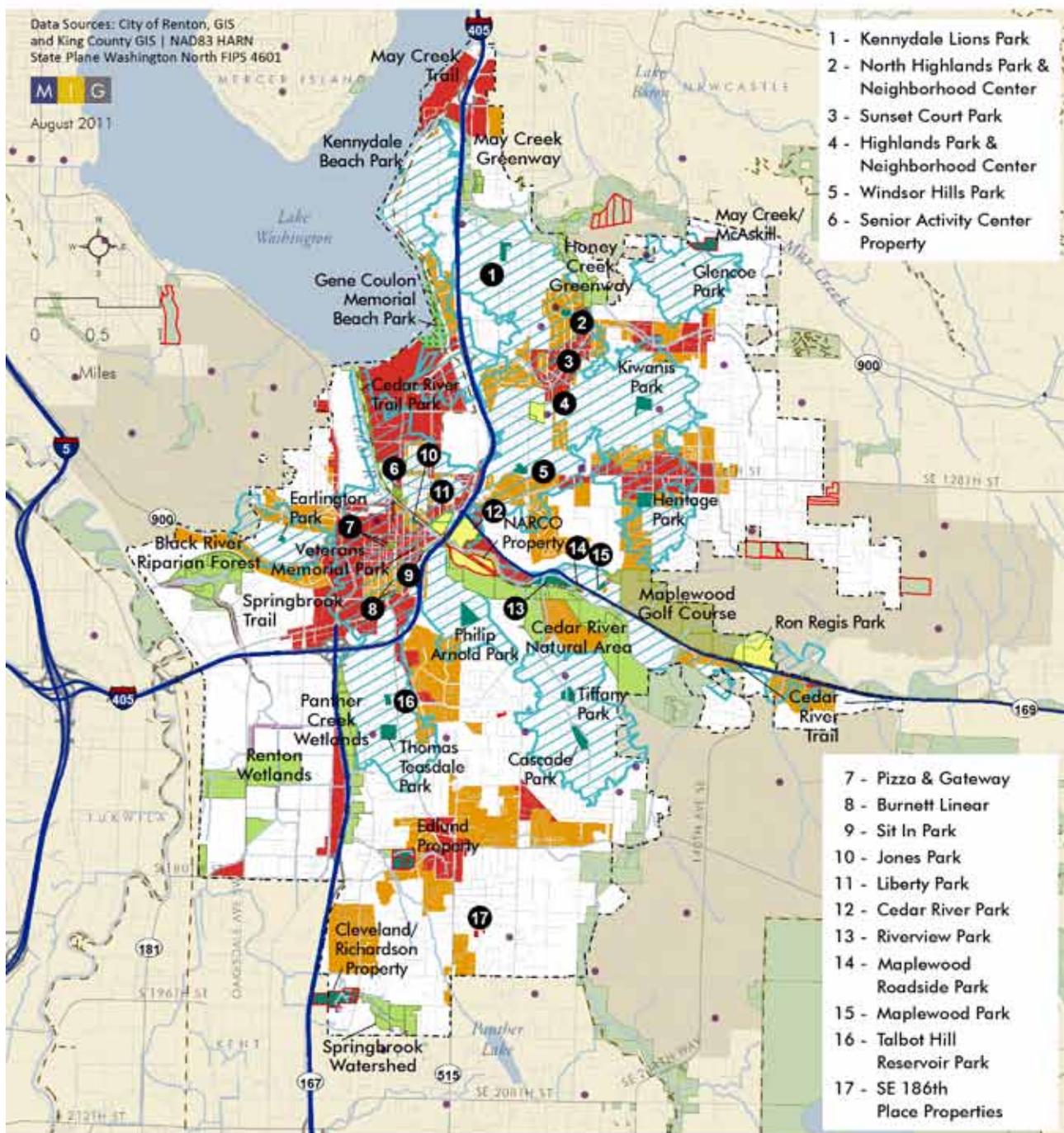
Figure 4-1: Preferred park type in Renton (Survey, 2011)



5 Residential zoning categories: R-10 and higher.

6 Commercial zoning categories: Urban Center – North 1 and 2; Center Village; Commercial/Office/Retail; Commercial Arterial; and Center Downtown.

DEVELOPED PARK ACCESS AND RESIDENTIAL DENSITY





Creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach produced a 48.4 percent increase in frequency of physical activity.

- American Journal Of Preventative Medicine (2002)

PARK LAND SYSTEM-WIDE

Building out the system within the existing city limits to the distribution standards described above requires twelve new neighborhood and community park site land acquisitions (not including land already in public ownership). A park system acreage standard helps relate system-wide park land need to the quantity criteria. This standard is calculated from the current existing park and natural area land inventory plus the additional acreage needed for the twelve new park sites. Table 4.2 summarizes the resulting proposed standard for the total park and natural area system, as well as the subset of developed parks (neighborhood, community, regional, special use and corridors).

Table 4.2: Proposed Park Acreage Standards⁷

Type	Standard
Developed Parks	5.07 acres/1000 population or 1 acre of park land per 200 people
Natural Areas	Minimum of 6.14 acres/1000 population
Total Park and Natural Areas System	Minimum of 11.21 acres/1000 population

These standards are a reduction from the prior adopted standard, which totaled 18.58 acres per thousand population (Total Park and Natural Areas System), recognizing that most of the largest natural area sites are already within public ownership and additional acquisitions within the city limits are likely to be smaller targeted purchases. The total park system standard is set as a minimum. Land can be added beyond this standard, particularly in the case of large natural area or regional park sites which are based on unique opportunities rather than the growth of population.

⁷ The standard above is based on the following assumptions: 2030 population of 124,106; 95 additional acres of neighborhood and community parks; a minimum of 75 additional acres of natural areas.

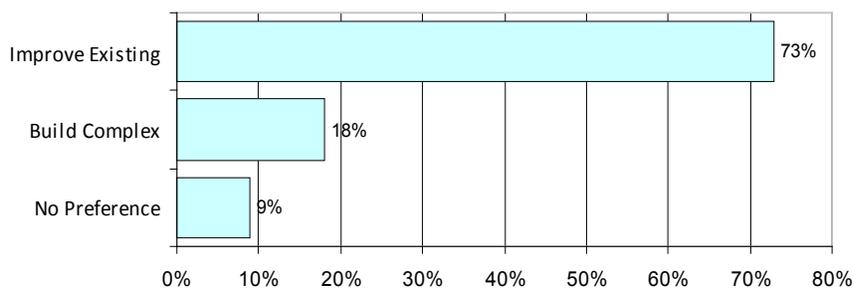
Public input also revealed that several popular city parks receive the majority of use in Renton. This is especially true for parks with water access such as Gene Coulon Memorial Park, as well as other signature parks such as Liberty Park, Cedar River Trail Park and Cedar River Park. There is a need to enhance and renovate facilities and increase the level of maintenance at these sites to handle current park use and ensure a quality user experience. Improvements proposed for these locations as outlined in the Project List will help meet these demands and needs.



RECREATION FACILITY NEEDS

The planning process identified needs for a variety of park and recreation facilities. The recreation facilities assessment incorporated the use of four tools to determine recreation facility needs. This included a review of statewide recreation trends, a sports field level of service (LOS) analysis, a geographic analysis and a demand analysis for facilities including but not limited to sports fields, playgrounds, community gathering spaces, indoor programmable spaces, water access facilities, skate parks, dog parks and other facilities. In each case, the analysis evaluated Renton School District sites and facilities for their potential in meeting community needs.

Figure 4-2: Preferences for providing sports fields in Renton (Survey, 2011)



Sports Field Scale

Competitive: heavily scheduled and tightly controlled for designed uses.

Recreation: primarily reserved for scheduled games and activities during peak times.

Neighborhood: minimal or no scheduling for sports play.



SPORTS FIELDS

The analysis of sports fields includes a review of the number of fields by population and their geographic distribution. This analysis examines closely the potential of School District owned facilities to provide additional service. When including both City-and school-owned fields, the service area analysis shows that most areas of Renton are close to an existing sports field, with the exception of portions of the East Plateau, Benson and Talbot planning areas and the potential annexation areas within Fairwood, East Plateau and West Hill.

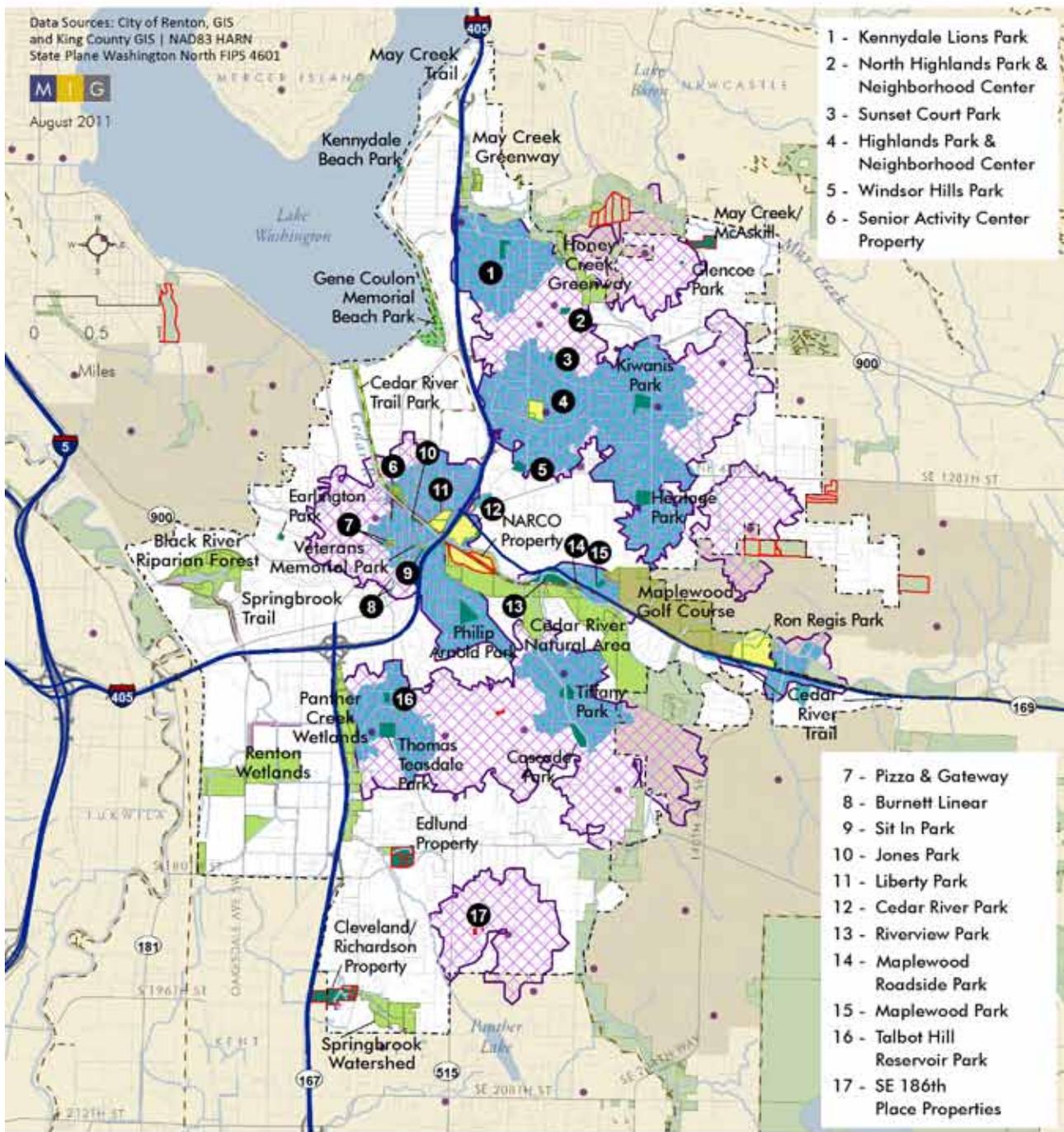
Public feedback indicated that there is a need for competitive-scale and recreation-scale facilities. Currently, the City of Renton provides one baseball/softball field per 21,588 residents and one soccer field per 86,230 residents.⁸ If School District fields are added to the existing City-owned fields, the ratio of fields to population is increased to one baseball/softball field per 6,663 residents and one soccer field per 10,779 residents.

There are limitations to the use of School District facilities. District athletic programs and school events take priority for use of these facilities even after school hours and on weekends. Outside these scheduled uses and regularly scheduled school hours, the public can access the school fields for reserved or casual play. However, many of the school fields are maintained for non-competitive use and do not meet recreation or competitive sports needs.

Based on the input from sports groups, the number of fields in the system (without differentiating between City and School District fields) is adequate. However, the actual amount of field time available and the level of play possible (determined by maintenance) are constraining factors. The configuration of fields also limits their use for competition. With most of Renton's fields distributed one to a park across the city, efficiency in maintenance or tournament play is more challenging.

⁸ Level of service calculations developed earlier in the planning process based on the available population figure 86,230

SPORTS FIELD ACCESS



- Regional Park
- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Natural Area
- Corridor
- Special Use Area
- Renton Property
- Other Jurisdiction Park

- Renton City Limits
- Potential Annexation Area
- Red border indicates undeveloped site
- Trail

- 1/2 Mile City Field Pedestrian Service Area
- 1/2 Mile School Field Pedestrian Service Area
- Pedestrian Barrier
- Renton Technical College
- School



At a minimum, the City needs to establish a sports field level of service of 1/6,663 for baseball/softball fields and 1/10,779 for soccer fields. The improvement of some existing fields in the City inventory and additional fields at new parks will help to increase the playable time available. As fields are added to meet this standard, the City also needs to take advantage of opportunities to locate multiple fields in one park site and add a special sports field complex. Even with new fields it is unlikely the City can meet the standard alone, therefore reaching the community’s needed level of service is reliant on the use of School District facilities.

PLAYGROUNDS

According to recreation participation and public involvement findings, playground use is a popular seasonal activity with one of the highest participation rates. The City provides playground equipment at approximately 75% of its neighborhood parks and just less than half of its community parks. The playgrounds analysis relied on a one-quarter to one-half-mile service area.

Renton’s playgrounds contain a very similar set of play amenities in all parks and lack diversity. As a result, there is a need for specialized play opportunities, such as inclusive playgrounds, nature play or other thematic or creative play opportunities.

The Benson and East Plateau community planning areas have substantial gaps in service. While residents in these areas have access to several School District playgrounds after regular school hours, additional playgrounds are recommended.

Based on the location of existing playgrounds, the community planning areas of Fairwood, Talbot and Valley are also short on nearby access to City and/or school playgrounds. Additional playgrounds should be considered here as well. Lastly, the Valley area is primarily commercial/industrial and therefore has a limited need for children’s playgrounds.

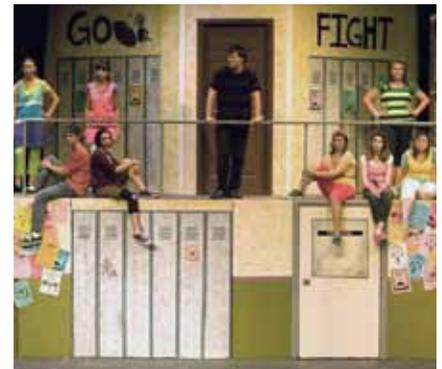
“City parks offer children the daily benefits of direct experience with nature - the motivation to explore, discover and learn about their world and to engage in health-promoting, physical activity.”

- City Parks Forum, American Planning Association (2003)

INDOOR PROGRAMMABLE SPACES

Indoor programmable spaces include public facilities available to serve large or small events and programs. Larger facilities typically include multiple specialized spaces (such as banquet rooms, gymnasiums or fitness studios) while smaller facilities may have one gym, general classroom space or special purpose spaces. Renton currently has one large indoor programmable space (the Renton Community Center) and 10 smaller scale facilities, which range from neighborhood centers to the Renton History Museum and Senior Activity Center. A basic evaluation of the quantity of facilities by population results in a ratio of one facility per 8,417 residents or 1.1 square feet/person.

The quantity of buildings is one factor but the quality and distribution of facilities rounds out the picture of indoor space needs. Some sites have permanent fixtures or facilities that relate to their primary purpose, such as the exhibits at the Renton History Museum, but also have the potential for other programming. The smallest recreation buildings, the activity centers in a number of neighborhood parks, have been closed due to operating costs, reducing both the quality and distribution of service. A system with a distribution of larger facilities, providing a more complete range of programming opportunities, would extend programming benefits to more of the population. Geographic analysis of indoor programmable spaces focused on a travel distance of two miles. This analysis indicated that the City would need to add two large scale facilities to serve the city, one in the Highlands/East Plateau and a second in either Talbot or Benson. Indoor space is expensive to build and maintain and the City also needs to ensure that the existing indoor facilities are maximized. The City's facilities could also be augmented by school buildings if adequate public access is secured.





SPECIALIZED FACILITIES

Specialized facilities serve the entire city or at a minimum, a substantial portion of the city. Due to the nature of these facilities, the geographic distribution of specialized facilities is not necessarily as important as their quality and existing capacity. Residents feel that Renton’s recreation facilities are important assets. As such, adequate repair and maintenance is needed to sustain these resources and extend their lifespan. The following provides a summary of needs for specialized facilities.

- Swimming Pools/Aquatic Facilities:* The City of Renton owns and operates the Henry Moses Aquatic Facility which offers outdoor swimming and water play, including lessons and fitness classes. On warm days, the demand can far exceed the capacity. The Renton School District currently owns, manages and maintains two existing indoor pools. These facilities meet the existing demand for indoor pool use.
- Skate Parks:* There is a demand for additional skate parks, which could be filled by additional facilities located elsewhere in the park system and similar to the existing skate park at Liberty Park.
- Water Access Facilities:* Access to Lake Washington for swimming, motorized and non-motorized boating (including sailing, canoeing, kayaking and rowing) is provided at Gene Coulon Memorial Beach Park. Additional water access facilities are included at Kenndale Beach Park (swimming), Cedar River Trail Park (non-motorized boat launch) and the Cedar River Boathouse (canoe and kayak rentals, lessons and access) as well as Riverview Park on the Cedar River (non-motorized boat access). Demand for water access facilities is very high, and additional

facilities are needed to support rowing, sailing and other small craft. Improved maintenance at some of these locations will also enhance public access.

- *Dog Parks:* At least one large and/or several smaller permanent off-leash areas are desired, according to public involvement findings. New facilities should be geographically dispersed and could be provided in areas with high or increasing residential density (where yard space for dogs is limited).
- *Outdoor Courts:* Renton has 17 tennis courts and 13 basketball courts (including the recently refurbished basketball court at Liberty Park by the Jamal Crawford Foundation) located mostly in neighborhood and community parks. Additional outdoor courts for basketball, tennis and volleyball are needed as part of park construction, filling gaps in service throughout the park system.
- *Community Gardens:* The public has expressed a desire for more community gardens (in addition to the community garden located at the Senior Activity Center), especially in areas near higher density residential development.
- *Interpretive Facilities:* The City has a limited number of interpretive facilities which currently include signage and educational kiosks within the park system. The public expressed an interest in providing more of these education-based amenities throughout the park system. Interpretive facilities should focus on unique or readily accessible natural elements such as the Cedar River and the Black River Riparian Forest.





“Renton has many areas of important wildlife habitat that should be better protected and shared.”

- Community Questionnaire Respondent

NATURAL AREA AND RESOURCE NEEDS

Through site visits and off-site analyses, the evaluation of the City’s natural areas and resources included an evaluation of public access to these lands, as well as an assessment of overall value and condition (level of maintenance).

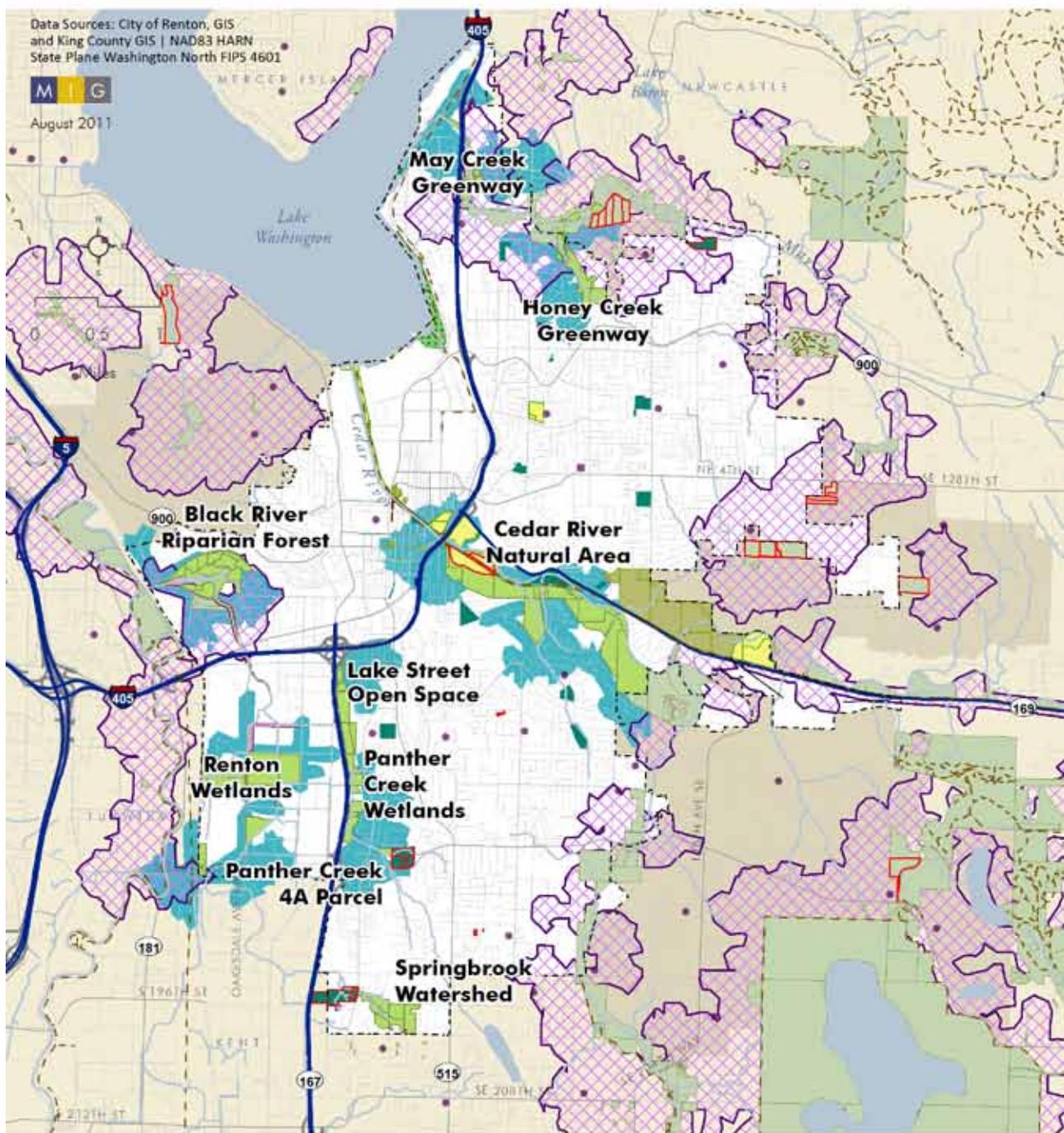
ACCESS TO NATURAL AREAS

Because of the importance of having nearby access to natural areas in Renton, the natural areas assessment used a half-mile travel distance as well. (Natural Area Access Map) As indicated by the map, there are many natural areas managed by other jurisdictions that are located along the periphery of Renton. However, all community planning areas within the city have areas that are unserved by natural areas within a half-mile distance. Existing trails in natural areas are generally short, discontinuous and designed for foot traffic only. The shortage of trails makes site management more challenging. In the absence of formal trails, users are more likely to create their own trails for cut-through travel or recreation purposes. Based on these conditions, there is a need for improved system-wide management of Renton’s natural areas, basing decisions on future site improvements and restoration efforts on well informed data and planning.

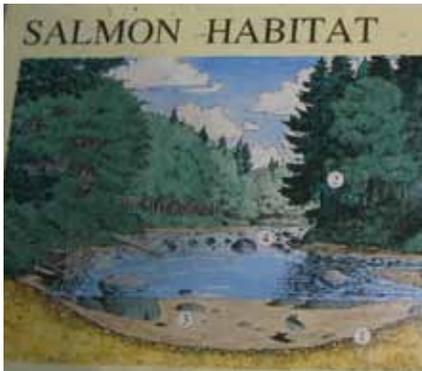
MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL AREAS

Management of Renton’s natural areas is an important need. Findings from the public involvement process indicate that residents feel strongly about balancing public access to natural resource areas with the need to protect and conserve these important assets. The City’s salmon habitat, tree canopy and natural areas are all important components of the community’s identity. For this reason, there is a need to manage, maintain and restore natural areas to support environmental and community health.

NATURAL AREA ACCESS



- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Regional Park | Renton City Limits | 1/2 Mile Pedestrian Service Area |
| Community Park | Potential Annexation Area | 1/2 Mile Other Agency Owned Pedestrian Service Area |
| Neighborhood Park | Red border indicates undeveloped site | Pedestrian Barrier |
| Natural Area | Trail | Renton Technical College |
| Corridor | | School |
| Special Use Area | | |
| Renton Property | | |
| Other Jurisdiction Park | | |



Spending time in green environments can relieve not only anxiety and stress, but also sadness and depression.

- Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat (2010)

The future management and maintenance of natural areas within the city will require coordination to ensure efficient and strategic use of resources. Many urban natural areas in the Pacific Northwest face similar management challenges, in that they contain degraded ecosystems that are relatively small and fragmented. Invasive species often overcome native ones, and these areas can be subject to dumping, encroachments, vandalism and homeless camping. Many, if not most, urban natural areas have been left undeveloped because they are very steep, unstable, wet or subject to flooding. Access to these areas, for recreation or for maintenance is often difficult.

Heightened management and maintenance of natural resources is needed with special attention toward addressing invasive species. The presence of non-native plants is the single greatest threat to the ecological integrity of Renton’s natural lands.

RECREATION PROGRAMMING NEEDS

The analysis of recreation programming outlines the range of existing and desired program types, identifies providers in the community and nearby areas and applies a set of desired outcomes to identify service gaps. The gaps in programming present opportunities for the City to improve and modify program offerings or identify partners to take the lead.

The recreation programs and partnerships analysis included four parts: a review of the range of existing and desired recreation programs; a description of providers in the community and nearby areas; a comparison of desired programs against existing programs/available facilities; and an identification of program service gaps. Findings include a summary of program and participant focus areas.

PROGRAM AREA GAPS

Based on public input, the analysis of the competitive sports environment and the proposed target outcomes, the following program areas could be added or enhanced within the mix of the City of Renton's offerings. The City should continue to serve or provide additional opportunities in the following areas:

- Special Events
- Crafts and visual arts
- Gardening (classes)
- Environmental education
- Outdoor recreation (e.g. boating, snow sports classes and events)
- Volunteer opportunities

Program areas with opportunities to develop partnerships with other providers in expanding or complementing City of Renton programming include:⁹

- Sports and School District partnership
- Emergency preparedness and first aid
- Environmental education
- Performing arts

FOCUS POPULATIONS

The type and extent to which recreation programming is available to different ages and demographic characteristics is another important factor. The programming assessment revealed five population groups in need of improved programs and services:

- *Preschool (up to age 5):* The primary need in this age group is for early childhood education, which can take many forms. The City currently provides programming in this



⁹ These additional program or program development needs do not immediately supersede the existing range of programming offered by the City.



There is a natural biological tendency for adolescents to seek out opportunities for risk-taking, novelty-seeking, and sensation-seeking behaviors. Park and recreation departments can provide important and safe outlets for these high-intensity experiences.

- The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidenced Based Approach (2010)

area and should regularly revisit the level of investment and type of programs to ensure that the programs are meeting the desired goals.

- *Elementary School Age (5-11)*: Health and Fitness, Outdoor Recreation, Specialized Recreation and Gardening (new) programs should be added or targeted more specifically to this age group.
- *Middle School (12-14)*: Additional programs in Health and Fitness, Outdoor Recreation and Specialized recreation are needed for this age group.
- *High School Age (15-18)*: High school students should have additional or new opportunities for programs in Crafts and Visual Arts, Outdoor Recreation, Environmental Programming(new) and Gardening(new).
- *People with Disabilities*: People with disabilities need additional or new programs in the following areas: Camps, Sports Classes, Environmental Programming (new), Gardening (new) and Family Support Services.
- *People from Diverse Cultures*: Renton’s program offerings are open to all; however language and cultural differences can create unintentional hurdles. Using alternative outreach methods and providing outreach in different languages could increase accessibility. Public agencies such as Renton Community Services have a unique opportunity to be a cross-cultural gathering point in the community, a role that is not typically a focus of private recreation providers. Needs for this population include programs in Outdoor Recreation, Performing Arts, Specialized Recreation, Sports Classes, Environmental Programming, Gardening, Youth Services, Family Support Services and Senior Support Services.